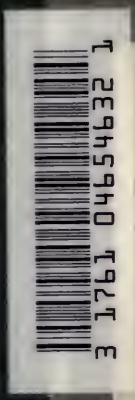
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and The married bachelor
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MY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE.

A FARCE.—BY A. BUNN.

Dramatis Personæ.

[See page 9.

As first performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, October 7th, 1833.

Somerton (an Artist)	Mr. Cooper.	Mrs. Somerton	Miss Taylor.
Timothy Brown (a City Broker)	Mr. Meadows.	Mrs. Brown	Miss Kenneth
Jonathan Smith (a Tailor) ...	Mr. Bartley.	Mrs. Smith.	Miss Murray.

their respective Wives.

COSTUME.

RIDICULOUSLY ECCENTRIC, BUT IN MODERN STYLE.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; D. F. *Door in Flat*; R. D. *Right Door*; L. D. *Left Door*; S. E. *Second Entrance*; U. E. *Upper Entrance*; M. D. *Middle Door*; L. U. E. *Left Upper Entrance*; R. U. E. *Right Upper Entrance*; L. S. E. *Left Second Entrance*; P. S. *Prompt Side*; O. P. *Opposite Prompt*.

RELATIVE POSITIONS.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; C. *Centre*; R. C. *Right of Centre*; L. C. *Left of Centre*.

B.	RC.	C.	LC.	L.

*** *The Reader is supposed to be on the Stage, facing the Audience.*

MY NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE.

SCENE.—*A chamber. At the first entrance* O.P. *is a window, and at the second entrance a door, leading to an inner apartment. At the first entrance* P.S. *is a small apartment, the inside of which is visible to the audience. It is entered by a side door, with a window over it—a centre door in the flats—on one side a painter's easel, with a picture on it—pistols crossed hang up against the wall, near the window—a table partly laid out—chairs—a buffet, surmounted by a looking-glass, containing plates, glasses, &c.—an open portmanteau, with a military uniform and cap in it—on a chair, a gun near the portmanteau, and at some distance in an arm-chair is a dressing-gown and morning cap.*

MRS. SOMERTON, MRS. BROWN, *and* MRS. SMITH *discovered.*

Mrs. Som. Well, my dears, say what you will, I repeat it again, men are all monsters.

Mrs. B. All—except Mr. Brown——

Mrs. Sm. And Mr. Smith.

Mrs. Som. (*Aside.*) Poor souls! if I were to tell them all. (*To them.*) Don't flatter yourselves too much; certainly I have every confidence in the affection and fidelity of *my* husband; but (*significantly*) when I see what is going on in other establishments, I tremble for fear Mr. Somerton should be as deceitful as the rest of the world; and, notwithstanding appearances, I really would not swear to anything.

Mrs. Sm. There I have the advantage over you, Mrs. Somerton; for I swear Mr. Smith is faithful to me.

Mrs. B. And I'll take my oath Mr. Brown is faithful to me.

Mrs. Som. Really!

Mrs. Sm. I am not at all astonished at *your* being uneasy, my dear Mrs. Somerton, who have married a wild, giddy young man. It is not possible you could be otherwise; but Mr. Smith being a plain steady tradesman, of a steady age——

Mrs. B. And Mr. Brown—a city broker—never out of his counting-house, and one whose sole thoughts are on his business and his wife's happiness—he never does anything without consulting me.

Mrs. Som. Really!

Mrs. Sm. Then Mr. Smith is as modest, timid, and reserved as a young girl, and would not dare to open his mouth without first asking my permission.

Mrs. B. It is this which makes me love Mr. Brown.

Mrs. Sm. And me adore Mr. Smith.

Mrs. B. (*To Mrs. Somerton.*) But your husband, my dear, is too giddy and dissipated.

Mrs. Sm. And not half reserved enough in his conversation.

Mrs. B. And looking at all women with singular audacity. Oh, my dear Mrs. Somerton, really——

Mrs. Som. My worthy neighbours, you are too good by half; but I don't want—(*they rise*)—any one to be uneasy about me. I am very happy, believe me. I love my Somerton just as he is, with all his good qualities and all his failings! I never grumble with the friends of my husband, and prefer that he should be polite and attentive to all who visit us—even to *you*, my dears!

Both. To us?

Mrs. Som. To be sure, for you know you are both very handsome.

Both. Oh!

Mrs. Sm. You are too kind.

Mrs. Som. Notwithstanding we are neighbours, you might be dangerous rivals. But I have no fear of you.

Mrs. B. You have no reason.

Mrs. Sm. No, none.

Mrs. Som. Of course not; at the same time, I defy you, with all your charms and all your esprit, to make him inconstant; but, as friends and neighbours, I must speak very frankly to you, and tell you that instead of troubling yourselves so much about what is going on in *my* house, you should look a little more to your own. (*Aside*). They won't easily get over that.

Both. In *ours?*

Mrs. B. What can she mean?

Mrs. Sm. Why, my dear Mrs. Somerton, what are you thinking about?

Mrs. Som. Oh, nothing of any moment or certainty—I most sincerely wish your husbands may *always* be faithful to you—(*Significantly*).

Mrs. B. But, my dear Mrs. S., if you really know anything, you ought to tell us.

Mrs. Sm. Pray speak out.

Mrs. Som. Oh, bless you, I know nothing—at least nothing positive, nothing more than—you know about *my* husband, therefore my dear good people, suppose we change the subject.—What are you both going to do to-night?

Mrs. B. Oh, I'm going home, to be sure!

Mrs. Sm. So am I.

Mrs. Som. And I shall sup with Mr. Somerton—
(*Goes up to table* R.)

Mrs. B. And I with my dear Timothy.

Mrs. Sm. And I with my beloved Jonathan.

Mrs. Som. Well, a good appetite, and a good supper.

(*Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Smith are about to go, when Mrs. Somerton stops them.*)

But, I say—suppose by any chance your husbands should not come home?

Mrs. B. (*Vehemently*). What?

Mrs. Sm. (*Confidently*). That is quite impossible—
(*Going.*)

Mrs. Som. Well—I only said "suppose;" and if they do not, you will each find a knife and fork ready for you here.

Mrs. B. You are very kind.

Mrs. Sm. But don't make yourself uneasy, we shall have no reason to do that.

Mrs. Som. I hope not; however, you will find a hearty welcome, for I bear you no grudge, you see, for your attacks upon poor Somerton's fidelity.

Mrs. B. Oh, it is all nothing but neighbours' gossip. Adieu.

Mrs. Sm. Good night, my dear.

Mrs. Som. Good-bye, and don't forget; here's a plate for you, if you like to come back.

Mrs. B. Ha! ha!—(*aside, as going out*)—Poor thing! she knows her husband is gone out gallavanting.

(*Exeunt through door in r.*)

Mrs. Som. There they go, a couple of poor, silly dupes; I've put them in a bit of a fume, however; and it serves them right for coming in and abusing my husband to my face. Thank fortune, I'm not at all jealous, but I should like to revenge myself on these worthy people for trying to *make* me so; and there could not be a better opportunity, for these two identical husbands have each written me a love letter. Now, the idea of two such fellows, with two such names as Jonathan Smith and Timothy Brown—the one a stock-broker of five-and-thirty, the other a tailor of forty—daring to write billet-doux to their neighbour's wife is quite provocation enough. My husband is gone out to dinner, and was to have gone to the city ball afterwards, but I begged him to come home at eight to a minute; and, that we may keep the jest among ourselves, and not be the talk of the city, I have prudently given the servants a holiday, so that when Charles comes back, I must let him in myself, and I hope I shall be better able to answer than my neighbours for conjugal punctuality. (*A knocking heard.*) There he is, I'm sure.

(*Runs off at C. door, opens it, and advances with him.*)

Som. My dear, why did you open the door yourself? Where are the servants?

Mrs. Som. Never mind; they are all out.

Som. All out?

Mrs. Som. Yes, yes; but thank you, my dear Charles, for coming home thus in good time.

Som. It was your wish, my Caroline, and that was quite enough for me to obey it; but——

Mrs. Som. But—but—I hope it has not put you out of your way.

Som. Not at all, my dear; but I should, notwithstanding, like to know why you have pressed me so urgently not to go to this ball, and to come home exactly at eight.

Mrs. Som. You must first of all promise me faithfully that you will not fly in a passion with me, or be angry with anyone else; but have a hearty laugh at what I'm going to tell you.

Som. That's as it may happen.

Mrs. Som. And that if you are determined to have revenge upon anyone you'll let me have the management of it.

Som. I don't much like this opening.

Mrs. Som. Well, you promise me all this?

Som. Well, well, I will.

Mrs. Som. Agreed then. (*Taking a letter out of one of the pockets of her apron.*) Read that letter.

(*Giving it to Somerton.*)

Som. (*Reading the letter.*) "Adorable Caroline,"—what!—who is this impudent scoundrel?

Mrs. Som. You forget your promise, Charles, and are in a passion already—come, read on.

Som. (*Reading.*) "Adorable Caroline,—your derision and cruelty have preyed upon my heart, and caused it the deepest anguish. I am most anxious to tell you all I feel before I fly from you for ever, and as your husband is going this evening to the city ball, grant me the delightful favour of an interview. If I do not receive an answer from you, I will be under your window a little after eight, and will clap my hands three times as a signal to let you know I am there; when I hope you will not refuse to receive the last farewell of your disconsolate—Timothy." Timothy! What! Timothy Brown, the broker, my next-door neighbour?

Mrs. Som. The very man!

Som. Why, the impudent vagabond—with his mild manners and placid countenance! But there is no trusting to appearances.

Mrs. Som. But this is not all, my dear Charles. Read this! (*Taking another letter out of the other pocket, and giving it to him.*)

Som. Another?

Mrs. Som. Yes; but pray make haste and read.

Som. (*Reading*). "Incomparable and inexorable beauty! I am above all duplicity, and prefer candidly and at once opening my heart, rather than adopting any circuitous method. Since I first knew you I have almost ceased to know myself, and my heart will break unless I can relieve it by a personal confession. I therefore implore you to grant me an interview. I understand your husband is going to the city ball to-night. About a quarter after eight, you will hear under your window the sound of my flute, and if you will only deign to open it, it will convince me you are not inflexible. I shall bring with me some nice things for a quiet supper, which I have expressly ordered from Birch's, as a slight proof of the devotion of your attached Jonathan." What! That damn'd tailor, my other next door neighbour. Why, the tailor is even more impudent than the broker.

Mrs. Som. Now, is it not much better to laugh at these coxcombs, than to fly in a passion with them?

Som. But what do you propose?

Mrs. Som. First of all, that you go out.

Som. What! Go out?

Mrs. Som. That is indispensable: and as soon as you are gone I will receive them.

Som. But you must explain.

Mrs. Som. I shall receive them, and then—

Som. And then! What then?

Mrs. Som. (*Taking up a book from the buffet, and giving it to Somerton*). Here, take this volume, it is La Fontaine, and at the bottom of this page (*pointing with her finger*) you will read all I want you to do.

Som. (*Glancing over it*). Oh, I understand,—I take, and will follow implicitly your instructions.

Mrs. Som. It's settled then.

Som. Quite. (*Three claps of the hand are heard*). That's the broker to a certainty.

Mrs. Som. And to his time.

Som. Then I'll slip down the back staircase.

(*Somerton goes out at the door*).

Mrs. Som. Now then to receive my beau—but I must first set myself all in apple-pie order (*going to the glass*), for notwithstanding we despise people, we ought always to appear before them to the best advantage. (*Arranging herself before the glass, and speaking*). Mrs. Somerton, I think you are looking very well to-night. (*A knock at the door*). I'm coming. There's nothing like keeping one's lover

in a little suspense. (*Knocks again*). Coming, coming! Bless me, he's very impatient. There, now I'm all right; and now for opening the door—

(*Knocks again*)

Enter Mr. BROWN *at door in flat, which he leaves open.*

Oh, it's you, Mr. Brown.

Brown. At last, my cruel Caroline, I behold you. I almost feared you would refuse me admittance.

Mrs. Som. What! Do you think yourself so very dangerous then.

Brown. Not that; but you can, I hope, make some allowance for the feelings of an anxious lover.

Mrs. Som. You must not talk in that manner: for if anyone should overhear you—(*Sound of a flute is heard under the window*).

Brown. Why, that's a flute, and very like the tune that our neighbour Smith is so perpetually playing.

Mrs. Som. The very same (*Aside.*)—and the signal mentioned in his letter.

(*Mrs. Somerton opens the window, then says to Brown.*)

He's coming to spend the evening with us.

Brown. With us? Oh, Caroline! Caroline, this is cruel of you.

Mrs. Som. Cruel, indeed: why, what do you take me for? In the absence of my husband to remain alone with a man; and (*sneeringly*) such a captivating young man as you, Mr. Brown? Oh, no, I could not think of such a thing!

Brown. Then this is only to save appearances.

Mrs. Som. Oh, nothing more.

Brown. (*Aside.*) Well then I must put up with it; but it is dev'lish unpleasant for all that.

(*Enter Smith, on tiptoe, with a flute in one hand, and carrying in the other a basket with sundry provisions.*)

Smith. (*Looking in.*) The door left open: it is evident that she expects me. Are you alone, my pretty Caroline? (*Advances.*)

Mrs. Som. Oh, no; Mr. Brown is here, come on purpose to keep us company.

Smith. Brown!

Brown. At your service—if I can be of the slightest use to you.

Smith. Certainly, I'm delighted. (*Aside.*) The devil take him, say I. (*To Mrs. S.*) When is he going? I suppose he does not sup with us.

Mrs. Som. To be sure he does. (*Alternately to one and the other.*) My husband, you know, is gone to the city ball to-night; and I stay at home with two of his friends; if I was with one only, they might raise ill reports of me; but with two, even slander itself can say nothing.

Smith. Oh, certainly; you are very right. (*Aside.*) This fellow Brown is invited, I see, as a sort of go-between, and cloak to cover our proceedings; luckily, he is a great fool, and I can turn him about to my purpose as I please.

Brown. This damn'd fellow, Smith, is always in the way—

Smith. My dear friend—glad to see you (*to Brown*).

Brown. You are very kind.

Smith. Come, make yourself useful, and help me to open my provision store.

Mrs. Som. Aye, so do, and here's a table nearly ready to receive all.

Smith. (*To Brown.*) Well, prepare the table for some of Birch's very best. (*Aside to Mrs. S.*) You beauty, I adore you more than ever.

Mrs. Som. Are you mad?

Smith. Yes, I am, and you have made me so.

Mrs. Som. Be quiet—hold your tongue.

Brown. (*Leaving the table, and coming down the other side of Mrs. S.*) What is that he's saying to you?—is he making love to you?

Mrs. Som. Quite the contrary; he is telling me I ought to listen to you.

Brown. Oh, then it's all right!

Mrs. Som. (*Going to the table.*) The knives and forks are wanting—I'll go for them in the next room, and at the same time order coffee and liqueurs to be got ready.

Brown. Pray do not trouble yourself.

Smith. She's right; It all the fashion now—(*Mrs. S. goes out at door O. P.—Smith is about to follow her.*)

Brown. (*Stopping him.*) Isn't she a delightful creature?

Smith. What are you talking about?

Brown. (*As Smith is again about to follow Mrs. S., takes him by the arm and brings him forward.*) Now, my dear fellow, you can help me in a most essential manner with her.

Smith. Help you!

Brown. And if you will rely on my gratitude—

Smith. Why, my friend, I think you are out of your mind.

Brown. How?

Smith. Why, I calculated on you to plead my cause with Mrs. Somerton——

Brown. On me!

Smith. That is, if you wish to preserve my good opinion.

Brown. You love her, then!

Smith. That I do.

Brown. So do I, a hundred times more than you do.

Smith. You, fellow! love her!—I'd have you to know——

Brown. And I have you to know—if, sir, you have the audacity only to think——

Mrs. Som. (*Without.*) Now then, here they are—

Smith. She's coming; so pray be silent before her.

Mrs. Som. (*Entering.*) Now, gentlemen, to supper.

Both. Aye, to supper!

Brown. I shall have an eye on that fellow—(*Aside.*)

Smith. (*Aside.*) I sha'n't lose sight of you, Mr. Brown, I promise you.

Brown. Smith, my dear fellow, give me your hand—a thousand thanks—

Smith. Why what's the man thanking me for!

Mrs. Som. Why, for the handsome supper to which you have invited him.

Smith. It is not to me, but yourself, my dear Mrs. S., to whom all thanks are due.

Mrs. Som. Oh, no! to you.

Brown. To you both—you, my charming madam, (*to Mrs. S.*) and you, my good friend—to you both.

Smith. The man's a fool! (*Going to table.*)

(*Mrs. Som. sits at table, with Brown at her right hand, and Smith on her left hand.*)

Mrs. Som. Well, really, this is delightful—by the side of those we love, and opposite to those we esteem—surely man can desire no more.

Brown. After all, I flatter myself I am the man—
(*Aside.*)

Mrs. Som. Now, gentlemen, pray help yourselves.

Brown. I will first of all propose a toast—'Here's to the beautiful Caroline!"

Smith. "To the beautiful Carolino!"—The rascal there has got the start of me.

(*As they are about to fill their glasses, a knocking is heard at the door.*

Mrs. Som. Bless me, who can be knocking at this hour?

Brown. It's very odd—

Smith. And very unpleasant.

Som. (*Without.*) Caroline my dear, open the door to me.

Mrs. Som. It's my husband! I'm lost!

Brown. I wish I was.

Smith. I'm a dead man!

Mrs. Som. But what's to be done? Hide yourselves in mercy's sake.

Smith. It's very well to *say* hide, but where?
(*Rises.*)

Mrs. Som. (*Pointing to the chamber on the* P.S. *side.*) There, in that little closet—make haste—I'm half dead. (*In a loud voice.*) Coming, Charles, coming my dear. (*To Brown and Smith.*) Keep silent, or we're ruined.

(*They enter the door of the closet, as she goes to the door in* F, *and lets in Somerton.*)

Som. (*Advancing.*) This is not very kind treatment, my dear, to keep me waiting in this manner.

Mrs. Som. Don't be angry, Charles; the fact is, I did not expect you home so early.

Brown (*In chamber.*) How her voice trembles.

Smith (*In chamber.*) Enough to make it.

Mrs. Som. (*In a low voice, and pointing to the closet*). There they are.

Som. (*Aloud.*) I don't intend, my dear, to go to this ball to-night.

Brown and Smith. Oh!— (*A sort of mutual groan.*)

Som. What noise is that, love?

Mrs. Som. I heard nothing.

(*Both scarcely able to smother their laughter.*)

Smith (*To Brown.*) Don't breathe, or we're dead men.

Brown. I'm dumb.

Som. (*Looking at the table.*) You don't appear to have been very disconsolate in my absence, my dear, to judge by the display on your table—patties, lobsters, tarts, jellies, wine——

Mrs. Som. Why, yes, my dear—and no—why—that is——

Som. That is what, my dear?

Mrs. Som. Why, I had invited two ladies, our next-door neighbours.

Som. What! Mrs. Smith?

Smith. My wife.

Mrs. Som. And Mrs. Brown.

Brown. My wife.

Smith. Leave these women alone for getting out of a scrape. (*Inside chamber.*)

Brown. And perhaps for getting us into one. (*Inside chamber.*)

Som. So, my dear, you have invited our two neighbours! I'm very glad of it; run in, love, and fetch them, and say that supper is ready, and we are waiting for them.

Mrs. Som. I'll step in at once.

Som. Aye, do.

Mrs. Som. And bring them in instantly.

(*As she goes out at door in* F., *Somerton lays another knife and fork, and puts the table in order.*)

Smith. My wife will not come, I'm sure.

Brown. Nor mine either, for she expects me home.

Som. There, that will do; I shall sit here, between Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown, and my wife opposite to me.

(*Goes up stage, brings down his pistols and loads them.*)

Smith. Well, he's taking it very coolly.

Som. I'm not altogether comfortable in my mind, for when I came in, it struck me that my wife looked extremely embarrassed——

Brown. But what is he doing there?

Smith. I don't know! I'll peep through the keyhole.—Why, as I'm alive, he's loading his pistols.

Brown. Then he has certainly seen us.

Smith. Hold your tongue, Brown, or he'll stop it for you.

Som. (*Talking to himself, but loud enough to be heard by Smith and Brown.*). And a thought came into my head, that if she could—but that is impossible, for I am sure she loves me; besides, she well knows that if I were to surprise any man here at this hour, if he were the dearest friend I have on earth, I'd blow his brains out on the spot.

(*He is pacing the stage, and stops by the little closet where Smith and Brown are concealed, as he says the latter part of the sentence: they bob down their heads at his approach; he then seats himself by the table.*)

Smith. (*Lifting up his head*). Did you hear what he said?

Brown. Yes; but it won't bear repeating.

Som. I'll load them both with a couple of bullets. Thank Fortune, that touch of jealousy was but momentary; I have no right to suspect my Caroline,—and at this moment I ought to be especially grateful to her for inviting our two neighbours, particularly one of them, who is the most amiable and delightful woman on earth.

Smith. That's my wife!

Brown. No; mine.

Som. And I have been in love with her for a long time without daring to tell her so—

Smith. If he's in love with her, it is yours—

Brown. No; yours.

Som. However, to-day I feel a little more nerve and impudence in my composition, and I'll contrive some opportunity of declaring myself; so, my next door neighbour, I'd advise you to be on the look-out. Now let us put these out of harm's way in the closet—

(*He goes towards closet* P. S., *and is about to open it.*)

Smith. He is coming here!

Brown. Then we are a brace of dead men!

Mrs. Som. (*Outside.*) Come, my dear friends, this way—this way—

Som. Oh, the charmers! Here they come!—(*puts his pistols in a chair, and goes to door in flat*).

(*Brown and Smith cautiously open closet door, and peep out*).

Brown. At present we are well out of that!

Smith. Yes; if he don't come back. Every bit of my skin is like goose's flesh!

Enter MRS. SOMERTON, *with* MRS. BROWN *in one hand, and* MRS. SMITH *in the other.*

Som. Ladies, most welcome!

Mrs. B. Good evening, Mr. Somerton.

Brown. That's my wife, the coquette!

Mrs. Sm. Mr. Somerton, your most obedient.

Smith. And that's mine—the monster!

Mrs. Som. My dear Charles, our friends hesitated coming, for a moment, for fear of displeasing their husbands, but I assured them you would plead their cause before them.

Mrs. B. and Mrs. Sm. And we have only come on that condition.

Som. Willingly, most willingly—I was going to the city ball to-night, but I feel no regret at having abandoned its attractions, since it has procured me the pleasure of passing the evening with you. Will you allow me to offer you a hand?

(*Takes Mrs. Brown in one hand, and Mrs. Smith in the other, and places them at the table on each side of himself,—Mrs. Somerton opposite.*)

Smith. Why, they are going to eat up my supper!

Brown. And I am dying with hunger.

Som. (*Tasting the pattie and recommending it.*) This pattie is excellent, I assure you.

Smith. It ought to be, for it cost me half a guinea.

Som. Will you allow me the pleasure, charming Mrs. Smith?

Brown. Did you hear that? (*Aside.*) Poor Smith!

Mrs. S. My dear Charles, I am the only one you have forgotten.

Som. True, my love, but hospitaltiy to our friends made me a moment forgetful.

(*They drink, help each other, and seem to enjoy their supper.*)

Brown. I don't hear a word now.

Smith. How the devil can they speak, when all their mouths are chuck full?

Brown. I should like, at all events, to see what they're about.

Smith. There's a window, let us get up on the table.

(*They shut the windows facing the audience, then put a table against the door, and two chairs on table; they occasionally appear and disappear, the audience seeing what they are doing at the door.*)

Som. Well, really, this is one of the most delightful evenings I ever enjoyed.

Mrs. Smith. And, to tell you the truth, it's very pleasant now and then to be away from the restraint of one's husband.

Smith. (*At the window.*) Very, no doubt.

Mrs. B. And to enjoy a friend's society without any low and vulgar suspicions.

Brown. Very pleasant, truly.—I say, the supper smells nice, don't it?

Smith. Your wife seems to think so, for she's making a tolerably good example of it.

Smith. Brown, have an eye to your wife.

Brown Smith, have an eye to your forehead.

(*Holding up his two fingers.*)

Som. My dear Caroline, we ought to be obliged by your kind attention and good supper, but it seems to me there is one thing still wanting.

Mrs. S. What is that, Charles?

Som. Why, I daresay our friends would like one glass of champagne, just by way of a wind up.

Mrs. S. Very true, Charles.

Mrs. B. Champagne! we have some capital champagne at home; but my husband, a niggardly fellow, always locks it up, and never offers any one a drop; if you will wait a minute, I'll run in and fetch two or three bottles.

Brown. Precious little devil!

Smith. Hold your tongue, man.

Som. You shall not go alone—allow me to escort you.

Brown. Why the fellow offers his arm to my wife.

Mrs. S. By no means, I will go with you, my dear Mrs. Brown, and Charles shall stay and keep Mrs. Smith company.

Smith. So much the better, then she'll be under my own eye.

Mrs. B. Come along, my dear, we'll be back in a moment; but mind, my husband must know nothing about it.

(*They go off at door in flats, followed to the door by Somerton and Mrs. Smith.*)

Brown. The baggage.—I'll murder her.

(*Pokes his body half out of the window, and is pulled back by Smith, an action they alternately repeat, until the door is shut, and Somerton and Mrs. Smith have advanced.*)

Smith: Be quiet, Brown.

Brown. I'll be the death of her.

Smith. We shall be the death of one another, if you don't be silent.

Som. At length, my dear Mrs. Smith, we are alone.

Mrs. Sm. And what then, my dear sir?

Som. What, can you not guess?

Mrs. Sm. No.

Smith. Why, what the devil is going to happen now?

Brown. Hush! be quiet, Smith. Do you see Somerton whispering to your wife?

Smith. Whispering proves nothing.

Som. (*Going nearer to Mrs. Smith.*) I have sought this delightful *tête-à-tête* for many a long day past.

Mrs. Smith. (*Drawing herself up.*) Sir, do you know to whom you address yourself?

Smith. That's a settler for him.

(*Aside at window.*)

Som. To the most beautiful, most adored, yet most cruel of her sex.

Mrs. Sm. You greatly astonish me,—this is the first time you ever——

Som. If my lips have been silent, surely my looks must have made you acquainted with this passion, that will only end with life.

Mrs Sm. Pray think no more of me,—remember I'm married.

Smith. Charming creature, isn't she, Brown?

Som. Oh, I know that; but to whom?—a fellow not capable of appreciating your numerous attractions,—a low person altogether unworthy of your matchless beauty and innumerable charms.

Smith. What's that he says, Brown?

Brown. Be silent, I tell you.

Mrs. Sm. My husband is certainly very inattentive sometimes.

Som. To be sure he is—a scoundrel!

Mrs. Sm. Often absent from home.

Som. Abominable!

Mrs. Sm. And I must admit, his manners are not particularly polished.

Brown. I say, Smith,—she seems to have studied you pretty well.

Smith. I'll poison her—my manners, indeed!

Mrs Sm. And he has not much of the man of fashion about him.

Som. He's a positive lout.

Smith. I'll poison her.

Mrs. Sm. But still he is my husband, and I ought—

Som. You ought only to think of a love the most tender, and the most impassioned. Behold me, dearest, at your feet.

Mrs. Smith. Rise, pray.

Smith & Brown. On his knees!

Mrs. Sm. (*Aside.*) Poor Mrs. Somerton, who was so sure of her dear Charles's heart, and defied us to make him inconstant.

Som. What says my love—my darling?

Mrs. Sm. Oh, nothing, nothing; rise—pray, pray leave me.

Smith. The abominable creature! she's giving way.

Brown. It's like 'em all—except Mrs. Brown.

Som. (*Kissing her hand.*) Yon divine creature, grant me one favour—my demand is not a very exhorbitant one,—give me this bonquet, here in your bosom, as a pledge of your affection.

(*He takes a bouquet out of her bosom.*)

Mrs. Som. Pray—pray leave me.

Smith. There, he has taken her bonquet.

Mrs. Som. (*Outside.*) Come along, give me one of the bottles.

Som. They are coming back.

Brown. High time, eh, Smith?

Smith. I'm suffocated; I shall choke with rage.

(*During the whole of this scene, Brown had been pulling back Smith by the coat, who was putting his head out too forward.*)

MRS. BROWN *entering with* MRS. SOMERTON.

Mrs. B. Here they are, and we have picked ont a couple of the very best in the cellar.

(*They all sit again at table.*)

Mrs. Sm. That's right, my dear; that's just how I always serve Mr. Smith.

Smith. (*At window.*) Oh, dear, oh, lord.

Som. Well, now we have got his wine we had better make use of it; and the least we can do is to drink Brown's good health.

All. With all my heart.—Here's Brown's health.

Mrs. Br. Timothy Brown, your very good health.

Brown. (*At window.*) Thank ye, and be d——d to you. Oh, my very best champagne!

Som. It's really excellent; and as long as we haven't Brown's company, the more of this sparkling champagne we have, the more agreeable.

Brown. You are very good.

Som. And now allow me to propose Mr. Smith's health. (*They drink.*)

Mrs. Som. Now, suppose we go in the next room, and take a cup of coffee. (*They rise.*)

Som. A very good idea. Ladies, allow me to offer each a hand.

Mrs. S. Aye, do, and follow me.

(*Mrs. Somerton goes out at door O. P. followed by Somerton, between Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown. As soon as they are gone, Brown and Smith get down and replace the chairs and table, which they had placed against the doors, they then come out and pace the stage in a furious manner.*)

Smith. Perfidious woman! who would ever have thonght it?

Brown. My dear fellow, don't run about in this manner; be calm, and let us talk it over.

(*Pacing the stage furiously.*)

Smith. I'm half-mad, Brown!

Brown. No wonder—so would I be if I were you.

Smith. It's monstrous!

Brown. Infamous—shocking—ha, ha, ha!

Smith. What the devil are you laughing at?

Brown. My dear fellow, I'm not laughing; it's an hysterical sympathy with your situation. (*Aside.*) Poor Smith! who was so sure of the virtue of his wife. Upon my soul, I can't help laughing, if I were to die for it. (*To Smith.*) Pray pardon me; but I really cannot help it.

(*Stamping of feet without.*)

Smith. Hush—somebody's coming! Help to replace the chairs, and—— (*They replace them.*)

Brown. Psha! 'Tis all fancy. So suppose now, while they are at their coffee in the next room, we sit down here and pick a bit, and take the liberty of making free with some of my own dear wine.

Smith. Thank you, I'm not hungry.

Brown. But I am; for I've had nothing to take away my appetite; and really this paté of yours, Smith. (*He goes to the table, cuts a bit of the paté, and is just about to eat, when the door opens*). By all the saints in the calendar, here's my wife coming— (*He hides under the table.*)

Smith. His wife!—

(*He hides himself behind the easel, on which a picture is.*)

Enter Mrs. BROWN, *speaking as she enters door,* O. P.

Mrs. B. Now do allow me. While you are finishing your coffee, I'll go and clear the supper table, and put all in order. (*Coming forward*). Well, I must confess that Mrs. Smith is a terrible flirt.

Smith. (*Behind easel*). There's no doubt whatever of that.

Mrs. B. What looks she has been glancing towards Somerton; I really blush'd for her.

Brown. (*Putting out his head from under the table*). My dear little wife, I'd give you a kiss if I dared.

Mrs. B. At the same time, I must confess that Somerton is very agreeable, and also that he has—

Brown. Not so fast, ma'am, if you please.

Smith. They are birds of a feather, that's evident.

Mrs. B. He also has a fine figure and a good expression of countenance.

Brown. (*Putting his head out*). It's a damn'd lie.

(*Here Somerton steals softly in at O. P. door.*)

Mrs. B. But I cannot understand how he could have such bad taste as to make love to Mrs. Smith, a woman altogether so unworthy of him; that is a thing I really never can forgive him for.

Smith. Nor I either.

Som. (*Touching Mrs. Brown's shoulder*). What, still inflexible.

Mrs. B. (*Starting*). Oh, Mr. Somerton! you quite frightened me!

Som. Fear! Oh, fear is not the sentiment with which I would inspire you!

Smith. (*Popping his head from behind the easel, at the same time that Brown puts his head from under the table, and seems in a violent rage*). It's your turn now, Brown.

Mrs. B. (*To Somerton*). I suppose you think you are addressing Mrs. Smith.

Som. Mrs. Smith! I detest her very name—I cannot endure the sight of her; and if I seem'd to pay her any particular attention, it was only to divert the thoughts of one who knows too well who is the object of my affections.

Mrs. B. I really do not understand you, sir!

Som. The moments are precious—only say that some day you will bless my vows—name some time when I may hope, and till then give me some slight token of one I can never cease to love—promise me this, adorable woman!

Brown. Familiar rascal!

Smith. This is worse than what he said to Mrs. Smith!

Som. What, silent! dearest one! then give me this bracelet, twined around your arm—

(*Takes bracelet from her arm.*)

Mrs. B. Oh! pray give it me back—(*Here Brown shakes his fist at her*). If my husband were but to see it!

Brown. He must be damn'd blind if he didn't!

Som. Oh! don't think of him—dear, kind creature! give me but one kiss.

Mrs. B. Sir! really, sir—this audacity—

Som. There's no harm, dear, in a kiss.

(*Gives her several kisses, against which she slightly struggles.*)

Smith. (*Chuckling.*) How they sound!

Brown. The trait'ress!

Mrs. B. (*Struggling with Somerton.*) Oh, if my husband were to hear him!

Smith. He must be damn'd deaf if he don't.

[*Mrs. Brown gets away from him with some difficulty, and runs into the chamber* O.P.

Som. She's a charming creature! and I decidedly give her the preference.

Smith. I'm glad of it, the scoundrel!

Brown. Oh! the blackguard!

Som. However, they are both dev'lish nice girls, and will answer one's purpose very well to pass an hour or two with now and then—altogether, we've had a delightful evening, and I must now go and put up my pistols, which I had quite forgotten. (*Goes and takes pistols off the chair.*) Oh, Mr. Smith, Mr. Brown!—Mr. Brown, Mr. Smith, I strongly suspect I shall give you both a violent headache!

[*Exit into closet* P.S.

Brown. (*Looking out.*) Pheugh! where is he gone?

Smith. (*Peeping on one side of the glass.*) Hold your tongue; there he is, with those damned pistols again.

[*Here Somerton closes up the window, goes towards the door* O.P., *pointing laughingly at the table, and exit.*

Smith. (*Peeping out.*) Brown!

Brown. (*Looking up.*) Smith!

Smith. We are a pretty couple.

Brown. Very. Give me your hand.

(*They come out and embrace each other.*)

Smith. Oh, Mrs. Brown!

Brown. Oh, Mrs. Smith!

Smith. Oh, that bracelet!

Brown. Oh, that bouquet!

Smith & Brown. (*Forcing a laugh.*) Ha! ha! ha!

Smith. It's exceedingly droll.

Brown. And extremely pleasant.

Smith. But I'll be revenged, Brown.

Brown. And so will I. Give me your hand; we'll have a mutual alliance, and come to a determination to take ample revenge.

Smith. Let us embrace again. (*They embrace.*) Now my mind's made up.

Brown. I was beginning to despair, but I'm nerved again—we'll treat them exactly as they deserve——

Smith. The idea of making such a fuss, and talking of cutting our throats, about one's wife's virtue.

Brown. Particularly when she hasn't got any.

Smith. Let us turn philosophers, Brown, and satisfy ourselves with knowing that half the world are like ourselves.

Brown. To be sure. Besides, after all, it's a thing that if you don't know, it's of no consequence; and if you do, you can't help yourself.

Smith. Hush! they are coming back.

Brown. And our hiding places are cut off.

Smith. Very true: what is to be done?

Brown. They are coming this way to a certainty.

(*He runs under the dressing gown on the arm chair.*)

Smith. Here they are, sure enough.

(*He runs under the uniform hanging in the portmanteau in the chair.*)

Enter SOMERTON, MRS. SOMERTON, MRS. SMITH, *and* MRS. BROWN, *at door,* O.P.

Som. And you really will go, then?

Mrs. Som. Oh, pray don't think of going yet.

Mrs. B. We really must;—it's ten o'clock and past.

Mrs. Sm. And I really tremble for fear my husband should have reached home.

Mrs. Som. I rather think not.

Mrs. Sm. However, they both may be, and although they should happen to be a little sulky, it is as well not to displease them too much.

Som. Now listen to me. If on return your husbands should pick a quarrel with you, I'll tell you both a way to make them silent.

Mrs. B. and Mrs. Sm. What is it?

Som. To tell them——

Mrs. B and Mrs. Sm. (*Eagerly.*) Well, what?

Som. A circumstance that happened the other day to one of my most intimate friends.

Mrs. Som. And to his wife?

Som. Yes. Well, this friend had two neighbours——

Smith. Brown!

Brown. Smith!

Mrs. Som. Which neighbours had two wives.

Mrs. B. and Mrs. S. Oh! wives,—well?

Som. These two neighbours had a great desire to seduce the affections of my friend's wife.

(*All here are silent, and paying deep attention.*)

Mrs. Som. Which she immediately mentioned to her husband.

Som. And he, bent on having his revenge on them, determined to seduce the affection of both their wives in return.

Smith and Brown. Oh!

(*Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown look confusedly at one another.*)

Som. Yes, and in concert with his wife, got up a capital farce with the two ladies. He alternately made the most desperate love to them, vowing eternal fondness to one, and perpetual constancy to the other; and in return for all his apparent devotion, he received from one, in token of her regard, a beautiful bouquet.

Mrs. Smith. (*Aside.*) A bouquet!

Mrs. Som. And from the other a—what was it?—Oh, I remember, a bracelet.

Mrs. B. (*Aside.*) A bracelet!

Som. But the most extraordinary part of the whole business was—that all this took place in the very presence of their husbands!

(*Here Smith and Brown, who during the dialogue have been dressing themselves as well as they could in the uniform and hat, and the other in the dressing-gown and morning-cap, look in consternation at each other and change places.*)

Mrs. Sm. What,—

Mrs. B. In their presence?

(*Looking anxiously around.*)

Som. Yes, in the presence of their husbands, who dared not say a word, because they were, in the first instance, the guilty party.

Smith. I'm all amazement!

Brown. I'm worse than that; I don't know what I am.

Mrs. B. Perhaps these ladies were not quite as culpable as you represent them, Mr. Somerton?

Som. Undoubtedly not; for I ought to add, to their honour and credit, that they were in the secret, and only assisted the scheme to tease their husbands. (*To Mrs. Somerton.*) We may as well give them the benefit of this lie, my dear, to prevent any further mischief between them and their husbands.

Mrs. Som. Oh, to be sure, to be sure—(*To Mrs. Smith and to Mrs. Brown.*) Oh, yes, it was only a neighbour's frolic—a game of tit-for-tat, very cleverly played.

(*Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown appear to recover a little.*)

Smith. Is it possible?

Brown. I breathe again.

Mrs. Som. And the matter ended in the two husbands coming from their hiding-places, falling on their knees, and asking pardon of their wives for all their transgressions.

(*Smith and Brown have now partially quitted the arm-chair and portmanteau; and, dressed most grotesquely—the back part of the uniform before, arms in wrong sleeves, &c.—advance, and fall on their knees on each side.*)

Mrs. B. What do I see? Mr. Brown!

Mrs. Sm. And Mr. Smith! I shall faint.

Smith. Pardon, pardon, my love, for all my little offences.

Brown. And pardon, Mrs. B., for all my peccadillos.

Mrs. B. The forgiveness should be mutual—we have both been a little to blame; but as no harm has arisen out of it, why, come to my arms, my dear Timothy!

Mrs. Sm. Ditto, ditto, my dear Jonathan!

Som. This is the exact termination of my friend's adventure; he gave back to each lady her respective property—to one the bouquet, and to the other the bracelet—(*Here Somerton presents the one to Mrs. Smith, the other to Mrs. Brown*)—and heartily forgave his two neighbours for the folly of attempting to make love to his wife.

Mrs. Som. And all parties being reconciled, they finally agreed to confine their devotions to their own firesides, and never, for the future, to interfere with

THEIR NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE.

THE MARRIED BACHELOR;

OR, MASTER AND MAN.

A COMIC PIECE, IN ONE ACT.—BY P. P. O'CALLAGHAN.

Dramatis Personæ

[See page 6.

As originally sustained at the Adelphi Theatre.

Sir Charles Courtall ...	Mr. Yates.	Thomas	Mr. Miller.
Sharpe	Mr. Wrench.	Labroche	Mr. Gouriet.
Truss	Mr. Sanders.	Lady Courtall	Miss Curties.
John	Mr. Smith.	Grace	Mrs. Fitzwilliam.

COSTUME.

SIR CHARLES.—Blue frock coat, buff waistcoat, trousers, and boots.

SHARPE.—A smart coat of white livery with red facings, fawn-coloured breeches, top boots.

TRUSS, JOHN, and THOMAS in similar livery, with shoes and white stockings.

LABROCHE.—White linen jacket, trousers, apron, and cap.

LADY COURTALL.—White satin dress, hat and feathers.

GRACE.—Pink petticoat, lead-coloured open gown, check apron, white handkerchief with a coloured one over it, mob cap and gipsy hat, mittens.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; D. F. *Door in Flat*; R. D. *Right Door*; L. D. *Left Door*; S. E. *Second Entrance*; U. E. *Upper Entrance*; M. D. *Middle Door*; L. U. E. *Left Upper Entrance*; R. U. E. *Right Upper Entrance*; L. S. E. *Left Second Entrance*; P. S. *Prompt Side*; O. P. *Opposite Prompt*.

RELATIVE POSITIONS.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; C. *Centre*; R. C. *Right of Centre*; L. C. *Left of Centre*.

R. RC. C. LC. L.

*** *The Reader is supposed to be on the Stage, facing the Audience.*

THE MARRIED BACHELOR.

SCENE—*A Park—Gates in centre,* R.—*A Bower,* L.—*A practicable little gate in Park wall; nearer to the audience, a Pavilion.*

Enter SHARPE *from centre gate, as if speaking to someone without.*

Sharpe. Certainly, madam, you may rely upon me; I hope your ladyship will enjoy the ride. (*Whip cracks without.*) Smack—crack—away they go; and away I go to my dear Grace!

(*Running towards gate in park wall.*)

Enter SIR CHARLES, L.

Sir C. Sharpe! Sharpe!—Was that my dear Lady Courtall that drove off then?

Sharpe. (*Startled.*) Yes, sir. (*Aside.*) Who the devil sent for you?—As her ladyship's aunt lives only five miles from this, she will soon be there.

Sir C. How long will she be away? I thought I heard her say something about three days.

Sharpe. My lady did say she would be absent about three days.

Sir C. Lady Courtall is a charming woman! Do you know, Sharpe, that marriage has not in the least cooled the ardour of my love for her?

Sharpe. Is it possible? Are you still in love with her, sir?

Sir C. (*Coldly.*) I doat on her; and during the six months that we have been in the country——

Sharpe. Six months! six weeks, sir.

Sir C. What, only six weeks?—Well, well, six weeks or six months, it does not much matter which—during those mo—weeks, that we have passed in the country together, I have hourly discovered new graces in her. Her affection for me seems to increase with my perception of her mental as well as personal charms. With what reluctance she left me even for three days. I could have found fortitude sufficient to spare her for a week; she has, however, but the weakness of her sex. I never think of my marriage but with delight.

Sharpe. Oh, sir, I rather think your marriage has delighted many a married man.

Sir C. (*Smiling.*) As for that Sharpe——But I am quite an altered man. I grant that I did, now and then—with this figure and—but that's all past. I swear now that my morals are——(*Crosses to* L.) What shall I do to pass away the time during the absence of Lady Courtall? It will hang heavily on my hands while severed from my dear wife.

Sharpe. Suppose you were to follow her. (*Aside.*) I wish I could get rid of him.

Sir. C. Why so I would, but it would appear so uxorious.

Sharpe. You are dressed, sir—a stroll through the village would amuse you—or a ride.

Sir. C. Do you think so? I'll for a few minutes—perhaps an hour—perhaps—if anything detain me beyond that time—if in the evening—nobody need sit up for me to-night.

Sharpe. Shall I——

Sir. C. No, no—you may remain. You have been a faithful servant, and I will allow you to be lord and master here during your mistress's absence and mine. The only service I require of you is to see that the decorations, which my dear wife lately spoke of, be attended to and completed in every respect, previous to her return. Get her also a lady's maid, as you know she is without one at present. In short, let everything be done to convince my charming Lady Courtall that her image alone fills the heart of her affectionate husband. (*Crosses.*) While I take my ramble, the house is yours——

Sharpe. Cellar and larder too, sir?

Sir C. Yes, cellar and all. I will now stroll among the surrounding shady scenes, to indulge in philosophical reflection, to chew the sweet and bitter cud, as Shakspere says.

[*Exit through the gates.*

Sharpe. Philosophical reflection! I think I can give a tolerably shrewd guess at the nature of your philosophy, good master of mine. If I am right in my conjecture, so much the better for me; 'twill bring grist to my mill. My situation with the Baronet is not what it was when he was single. He has no steward, and has promised me that berth—then I may pick up a trifle or two. Master of this house, cellar and all! Egad, I'll have a rare day of it with my dear Grace—I wonder where she can be all this while. I hope Sir Charles won't see her in the course of his *philosophical* rambles. What would become of poor Sharpe if he did? To be married, not only without his consent, but against his express commands! Luck, however, does befriend me this time; Sir Charles and my lady away, I may treat my pretty little wife in style. I wonder how many husbands there are who would believe that all my anxiety is only to meet my wife. (*Two knocks at the small gate.*) Here she is.

(*Opens the gate.*)

Enter GRACE, *through gate,* L.

Grace. A pretty thing, sir, to keep me waiting this hour, as if I were only your sweetheart.

Sharpe. Well, never mind, love; don't be angry; I won't do so any more. (*Offers to kiss her.*)

Grace. No, I won't, I'm vexed.

Sharpe. Come, come, kiss and be friends again. (*They kiss.*) There now, you little rogue, you—isn't that better than quarrelling?

Grace. Why, I can't say but what it is. See, there's the certificate of our marriage—be careful of it, for if you lose it——

(*Sharpe puts it in his pocket.*)

Sharpe. I know—we should have to begin everything afresh.

Grace. I begin to think it very hard that I am bound to keep our marriage so close a secret. Now do only let me tell it to my two cousins, and to three or four intimate friends, and to——

Sharpe. A pretty way that of keeping a secret! You may as well give it at once to the bellman.

Grace. Only let me tell it to——

Sharpe. My dear Grace, you know my love for you is ardent and sincere.

Grace. Yes, but one can't bear to be called *Miss* when one isn't a Miss; it makes me blush so.

Sharpe. But, my love, I've told you before, how angry Sir Charles would be if he knew I was married; for he settled a pension on me provided I lived single and continued in his service, over and above my wages.

Grace. Lord, how Sir Charles must hate us, then!

Sharpe. Quite the contrary; he adores a petticoat, but hates matrimony.

Grace. That's very strange, when he's a married man himself.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) That's the very reason, perhaps. Very true, but there—there was a beautiful woman, and five thousand a-year as a bribe, and many a man has sold himself for much less. He says that a servant, however active he may have been before marriage, is good for nothing after; so lazy, so——

Grace. He's very right, for since we have been married you do nothing but——

Sharpe. I'll do better by-and-by;—one word now would ruin us for ever. He has promised to make me his steward, and the perquisites then, you know, will set me above fear.

Grace. How long will that be about?

Sharpe. Oh, only a year and half—or two years—or——

Grace. What! must I keep the secret during two years?

Sharpe. It would be difficult for a woman to do that, I confess.

Grace. But in that time do you think we shall get rich enough to live ever after like a lady and gentleman, and ride in a carriage?

Sharpe. That we shall. Egad, you shall ride in one this very day!

Grace. Shall I? Oh, Gemini!

Sharpe. Bless your merry heart, you shall have a ride in a curricle and pair!

Grace. My dear William! (*Embraces him.*)

Sharpe. Oh, you coaxing baggage, Grace!—how often I say Grace—you must make yourself prodigiously smart, for I shall drive you round the park and village myself—pomponsly.

Grace. Lord, how I should like to stand by the road-side and see myself go by in a curricle and pair. Oh, the powers!

Sharpe. There, take the key of the little gate, that you may let yourself in, if I should be elsewhere when you return. Make all the haste you can.

Grace. I warrant me. I will be back in five minutes: and when I've put on the pretty new gown you gave me, and my bonnet and all, the folks will say that we are the handsomest couple in all Warwickshire.

[*Exit by small gate.*

Sharpe: Now to make them look about dinner, et cetera. Holloa! Thomas, John, Truss!—Where the devil are these lazy rascals? What, no one coming? Let them make my master wait if they choose; damme, I'll teach them the difference.

JOHN *and all the rest of the* SERVANTS *come running on, from* R.

Sharpe. Oh! there you are, are you? Now attend to the orders I am going to give you.

Truss. Why, we thought that our master being out, we might——

Sharpe. (*Interrupting him.*) Yes, you *might*, I dare say—but if Sir Charles is gone out for a day or so, he has left me factotum—invested me with ample powers, as the great men say.—Look, therefore, that you may obey my minutest order without the slightest murmur.—No kitchen conspiracy—no stable-grumbling—I know ye. In the first place, in about an hour, let me have dinner served.

John. We'll attend to you, as we would to our master:

Sharpe. Will you?—much obliged to you.—D'ye think I want to be the last served in the house? Oh, you are the new French cook, an't you?

Labroche. Yes, sare; I come here yesterday before to-day.

Sharpe. Well, then, to-day before to-morrow, I shall require a sample of your skill. Let me have a most exquisite and delicate assortment of dainties—dinner for two, enough for six—a lady and gentleman, with remarkably good appetites. Truss, do you get the curricle ready.

Truss. The curricle! I wanted to clean it up well—it wants it plaguily.

Sharpe. I tell you, I shall want to ride in the curricle.

Thomas. In the curricle?

Sharpe. Aye, *in* the curricle, you booby—I can go behind any day.

Thomas. Well——

John. But——

Truss: Mister Sharpe.

Sharpe. Don't Sharpe and but me. Let me have dinner ready at two o'clock. (*To the cook.*)—And you (*to Truss.*) the curricle and ontriders; Sir Charles has left me his orders, and if you——

(*Sir Charles is heard without calling "Sharpe."*)

Servants. Here is Sir Charles,—I'm off.

[*Exeunt cook, &c.,* R.

Sharpe. Sir Charles! Oh, it's impossible! he can't have——

Sir C. (*Without.*) Sharpe—Sharpe!

Sharpe. Confound it, it is he, though. What can have sent him back so soon? How unlucky! Grace will be here directly, and if that Bashaw of a master of mine once sets eye on her, she's lost—and I'm lost! What shall I do?—Here's one of the comforts of a married life! I'll run off before he catches me and tell——

(*As he hurries towards the small gate*)

Enter SIR CHARLES, *from centre gate.*

Sir C. Sharpe!

Sharpe. (*With affected surprise.*) Sir,—Bless me, sir, returned so quickly!—no accident I hope? (*Sharpe anxiously watches the gate.*) I wish there had been. (*Aside.*)

Sir C. Yes, and a most unlucky one too. You would little suppose what has ruffled me.

Sharpe. (*Trying to look cheerful.*) Excuse me, sir—how far off the mark should I be, if I said—a petticoat?

Sir C. Why, faith, not a mile. Two or three days ago, I saw one of the most bewitching little creatures in the world. Just now, I caught a glimpse of her again, but lost her in a moment, and was not able to find which way she turned among the cursed trees:

Sharpe: (*Aside.*) An intrigue afoot!—so much the better for me:

Sir C. I popped into every cottage round, yet all in vain; I saw plenty of pretty girls, but not one to compare to my little lost sheep.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Egad, if you lay hold of her, she is a lost sheep.

Sir. C. Such features—such bloom—such a shape—such a tout ensemble!

Sharpe. A what, sir?

Sir C. A tout ensemble.

Sharpe. Is that her nose?

Sir C. Pooh! (*Crosses to* L.)

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) I have it, it must have been the old exciseman's young wife.—Sir, I know the enchantress, and promise, that, before the day is out, you shall see her here. Indeed, I had purposed surprising you with the sight of such charms, but accident, it seems, has anticipated me.

Sir C. My faithful Sharpe! You know I am neither ungrateful nor ungenerous. Let me but see her again, and twenty guineas shall be your reward.

GRACE *opens the gate* (L.—) *and comes in without seeing Sir Charles, or being seen by Sharpe.*

Sharpe. I think I hear them clinking in my pocket already. Poor Gauge! Poor devil!

Sir C. (*Perceiving Grace, who is confounded at the sight of Sir Charles.*) What do I see? There, (*gives Sharpe a purse*) there, thou best of servants, thou hast well deserved it.

Sharpe. Pay me beforehand, sir! No, wait till the poor husband—(*Turns round and sees Grace.*) Fire—Faggots—Devils and Horns!

Grace. I beg pardon, sir—I—I—excuse me, sir, but, Mister Sharpe—

(*Gets between Sharpe and Sir Charles, and gives Sharpe the key.*)

Sir C. No apologies, my pretty maid; Mr. Sharpe told you to come, but it was I who wished to speak to you. (*Aside.*) What an ingenuous looking creature it is!

Sharpe. (*Whispers to Grace.*) It is Sir Charles—our secret—mum. (*Aside.*) Oh, lord!

Sir C. What's your name, my dear?

Grace. Grace, at your service, sir.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Grace, at his service.

Grace. Danghter of old Gertrude, who lives at the farther end of the village.

Sir C. I am afraid poor old Gertrude is not so well off as she was formerly. She shall came to Courtly Hall—We'll take care of you both. Sharpe will be delighted to take care of the old lady; he's such a good-natured soul—As for you, you shall be—let me see—the nursery maid.

Sharpe. (*Who has been in much agitation ever since Grace came in, gets between her and Sir Charles, and, while talking endeavours to make the former go away.*) In a nursery without children!—Come, that's a sinecure, however.

Sir C. (*Pushes Sharpe away.*) Well, you shall take all the linen of the house under your charge; that will just suit you.

Grace. (*Observing that Sharpe is making signs, behind Sir Charles, to her not to accept any situation.*) If you please, sir, I couldn't do it.

Sir C. Well, then, you shall—

Grace. Nor that neither, sir.

Sir C. You can wash, spin, sew, knit garters,—zounds! you can turn your hands to something, can't you?

Grace. No, sir, I can't do anything.

Sir C. The devil you can't!—Why, how do you pass your time at home?

Grace. I make cream cheese—

Sir C. The very thing—I sent for you expressly for that.—You shall be my dairymaid. I am a perfect gourmand when cream cheese is set before me—and so is Sharpe; an't you, my boy?

(*Slapping him on the back.*)

Sharpe. No, sir, it always curdles on my stomach—curse cheese!

Grace. But, sir—

Sir C. Never mind him, my dear, but go and instal thyself queen of the curd, thou bewitching cheese-presser!

Grace. I must go home, if you please, sir, for—it's our dinner hour.

Sir C. How unlucky we dine so late, you should else dine with me.

Sharpe. Sir—sir—consider; a peasant girl to sit at the same table with Sir Charles Courtall, Baronet, M.P., Magistrate, and married man—

Sir C. So much the better.—If I am married, no one will suspect the purity of my intentions. As to my rank—virtue ennobles its lowliest possessor; and high station never appears more glorious than in the company of modesty and beauty. The rarity too of their being seen together makes the sight more lovely. (*To Grace.*) We'll dine together—but how unlucky—we have no dinner ready.

Enter LABROCHE, (R.—) *running to Sharpe.*

Lab. Monsieur Sharpe—Monsieur Sharpe—Fant-il servir? Le diner is ready; all so nice.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) I wish the devil had you, you French hollyhock, for your news.

Sir C. What, a dinner at this hour?

Lab. Yes, sare—Monsieur Sharpe tell it to me to apprêter nice diner, and so I make him cook all myself, and I do not leave it to nobody at all.

Sir C. Sharpe, you are the Sultan of careful servants — (*Aside.*) I never saw his equal. (*To Labroche.*) Tell them to lay the table here in the garden.

[*Exit Labroche,* R.

Under the shade of these trees the repast will be delicious. What says Grace?

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Oh, she'll say Grace fast enough, I warrant me!

Grace. I will go and ask my mother, sir.

Sir C. I will take you home, and bring you back myself. Here, John.

Enter JOHN, R.

Let the curricle be got ready immediately.

John. It's all ready, sir.

Sir C. How!

John. Mr. Sharpe ordered it out, sir.

Sir C. Oh, I'm quite overpowered by these repeated proofs of his zeal and foresight—I can never sufficiently repay such services. Here, Sharpe. (*Giving him money.*) Half my fortune is not too much for such a servant.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) What a pretty figure I cut! How like a nincompoop I look!—Sir, I'm afraid her mother will be very uneasy—she'll think some accident has happened—I'm sure she'll have the fidgets about her.

Sir C. Right, right again; so do you run and tranquillize the old lady.

Sharpe. What? I, sir?—Hadn't you better send John?

Sir C. No, no—you can best manage matters.—You can tell a plausible tale—a lie, better than any man I know.

Sharpe. Oh, you flatter me, sir!—I assure you, John can lie better than I do—can't you, John?

[*John shakes his head, and exit* R.

Sir C. No more replies—go at once.

Sharpe. I go, sir.—(*Aside.*) But you little think what I mean to do; I'll spoil your sport, secure as you may imagine it.

[*Exit* R.

Sir C. I feel such satisfaction in the company of beauty and innocence, that I am determined to have a fête once a year, to which every pretty girl in the village shall be invited; though I can never expect to find any to compare with thee, love.

Grace. Oh, sir! I am sure I don't deserve half the compliments you pay me.

Sir C. Not deserve them! May I never have a kiss in my life again, if you—(*He attempts to kiss Grace — Sharpe re-enters,* (R.)—*with a towel under his arm and some plates in his hand, which he lets fall and breaks.*) Clumsy blockhead, see how you have frightened her!

Sharpe. I was only running to say, sir, that the kiss—the dinner is coming.

[*Dinner is served near the pavilion—Servants all leave* R. *except John, who remains.*

Sir C. Sharpe!—Why you must have flown—you can never have been—

Sharpe. (*Trying to find an excuse.*) I—I was thinking, sir, that that you might be better pleased if *I* waited on you. In such a case as the present, a prudent servant, you know, sir—

Sir C. True, true, and you are always prudent.

(*Leads Grace to the table; he sits* R. H., *she* L.)

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) I mean to be so; and one great proof shall be, not to leave you a moment alone, if I can help it.

Grace. (*Aside.*) If some of my acquaintance were to see me now, how they would fret!

Sir C. Come, Grace, my love, you don't eat.

Grace. The joy, sir—the honour, sir—takes away my appetite. (*Eats hastily.*)

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Neither one nor the other has taken away mine, for I am as hungry as the devil. Here I stand with my napkin in my hand, instead of having it tucked under my chin. How she eats!—and how he ogles and helps her!

Sir C. Sharpe, some wine.

Sharpe. Yes, sir. (*Fills two glasses.*)

Grace. Mr. Sharpe, your good health; not forgetting yours, sir. (*To Sir Charles.*)

Sir C. (*To Sharpe.*) Isn't she a charming creature?

Sharpe. Hum—so—so—at first sight, perhaps, but——

Sir C. What a bewitching smile!

Sharpe, Smile, sir?—A great deal more like a grin!

Sir C. Then her eyes!

Sharpe. Dull, sir, dull, and green as gooseberries.

Sir C. Dull to you, you clod; but sparkling to souls of fire.

John. (*Aside to Sharpe.*) His honour's right—they are pretty twinklers!

Sharpe. Oh, this is too much!—What business have you to put in your spoke?—Go to the devil, you—— (*Kicks John off,* R.)

Sir C. More wine.

Sharpe. Yes, sir. (*Aside.*) I wish it would choke him!

(*In his confusion he looks at Grace and fills a salt-cellar with the wine.*)

Sir C. What are you about?—Fill the glass, and not the salt-cellar. (*Sharpe fills two glasses, and, without seeming to know what he is about, takes up one and drinks it off.*) The fellow's mad! Leave the table, impudent varlet! Did you ever see so blundering an animal? Come, I will be your cup-bearer. (*They drink.*)

Grace. (*Aside.*) I'll punish William, if it's only in remembrance of the gooseberries!

Sharpe (*Aside.*) I shall go mad if this lasts a quarter of an hour longer!

Sir C. How many lovers have you, my pretty Grace?

Grace. Only one.

Sir C. Only one?—Impossible!

Grace. Only one, I assure you, sir.

Sir C. Lucky dog!—But he's a handsome, well-made fellow——

Grace. At first sight, perhaps, but——

Sir C. Sprightly, lively.

Grace. Dull, sir, dull as small beer.

Sir C. A stupid fellow, that can only twirl his thumbs or scratch his head—jealous, too, perhaps?

Grace. I am afraid he is—indeed, I am sure he is—and the next time he catches me alone, mercy on me!

Sharpe (*Aside.*) If it wasn't for that cursed pension, I'd tell the whole truth.—Humph!

(*Stamping.*)

Sir C. What's the matter?

Sharpe. (*Startled.*) The—cramp, sir;—only the cramp, sir!

Sir C. Have you prepared a dessert, too?

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Desert?—I wish you had your deserts. I can't stand it—I—Oh, I'll open the whole business at once! Sir, since the truth must out, Grace and——

Enter THOMAS, R.

Thomas. Sir, Lady Courtall is coming up the lime-tree walk.

Sir C. What, Lady Courtall coming?

Thomas. Yes, sir.

Sharpe. I'm saved—Phu! I breathe again.

Sir C. There—quick, quick, away with these chairs and tables, and everything. (*Considerable bustle and confusion—Sir Charles and the servant clearing away.—Grace running about in alarm. Sharpe appears spitefully to enjoy the scene, now and then following Grace.*) Why don't you assist, and not keep running about so, you scoundrel? As for you, my pretty one, I can't give you a ride home to-day, so you had better make all the haste you can by yourself. (*Runs with Grace to the small gate.*) Zounds, it's locked!—Where's the key, Sharpe?

Sharpe. The key, sir?

Sir C. Yes, the key.

Sharpe (*Takes it out of his pocket, looks at it, puts it in again, and pretends to search for it.*) I have lost it, sir.

Sir C. Death and the devil!—What's to be done?—My wife will suspect the innocence of my motives, and this pretty creature will seem as if—Hark, she's coming; run into the pavilion; it's the only refuge left.

[*Exit Grace into pavilion,* L.

Enter LADY COURTALL, *from gates*, SIR CHARLES *runs to meet and embrace her.*

Lady C. Oh, my dear Sir Charles, how happy I am to see you once more! I feared I should not arrive in time; but are you quite recovered, quite quite?

Sir C. Recovered! What do you mean? What brought you back so soon?

Lady C. Do not be surprised; I know all!

Sir C. All, Lady Courtall, (*Alarmed*) all, what all?

Lady C. See—this little note, written with a pencil, was placed in my hand by a boy, mounted on one of your horses.

Sir C. (*After reading the note, and aside.*) Who the devil can take so lively an interest in my health?—Sharpe, do you know the hand?

(*Crosses to centre.*)

Sharpe. No, sir, no—I hav'n't the slightest idea—(*Aside.*) My own little note.

Sir C. I'd give something to know whom to reward for this kindness.

Lady C. I am so glad it was but a false alarm—that the danger was not so great as my informer thought it.

Sharpe. It was rather serious, though, madam, while it lasted.

Lady C. If it ever should occur again, I rely upon you, Sharpe, for an immediate notice.

Sharpe. I will not fail to give instant notice to your ladyship, depend upon it.

Sir C. Come, my dear, it's all over now; will you take a walk? (*Aside to Sharpe.*) Contrive to get Grace away.

Lady C. I have been much flurried; I had rather rest in this pavilion a few minutes.

Sir C. The pavilion?

Lady C. Yes; why not?

Sir C. Why to tell you——(*Aside to Sharpe*) Invent—lie—swear: say something to get me out of this infernal scrape!

Sharpe. I will, sir—Her ladyship little expects to find in the pavilion—a—a—but I hope she will excuse——

Lady C. Find what?—Excuse what?—

Sharpe. A smart, pretty little woman, that I brought to——

Lady C. What! A woman brought to the Hall in my absence?

Sir C. (*With affected anger.*) How, a female!—(*Aside to Sharpe.*) Admirable!—admirable!—keep it up!

Sharpe. I will, sir,—better than you expect!

(*Aside.*)

Sir C. This must be explained, sir,—this audacity——

Sharpe. Sir—madam—I blush to say it; but the innocent cause of this confusion is—is—my wife.

Lady C. } Your wife!
Sir C. }

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Oh, my poor pension, there it goes!—Sir Charles always insisted upon having none but bachelors about him, and dreading his displeasure, I kept my marriage a secret.—My wife is virtuous, simple, and obliging.—Sir Charles, attentive to the slightest want or wish of his amiable lady, ordered me to look out for an attendant on your ladyship, and I confess I did wish to solicit your kindness for poor Mrs. S., and the forgiveness of my generous master for me.

Sir C. (*Aside.*) Upon my life, that fellow has the most admirable stock of invention!—His lies are so abundant, and so natural!

Lady C. My dear Sir Charles, how warmly my heart acknowledges the delicacy of those little attentions on your part. Sharpe, let me see your choice.

[*Exeunt Sharpe and Lady Courtall into pavilion*, L. *Sharpe and Sir Charles exchanging signs.*

Sir C. Was there ever such an extempore? As I live, one might have believed every word he uttered. That fellow's a treasure! How cleverly he introduced a wife to our notice! His sudden marriage, however, released me from a most disagreeable predicament. How easily a man may lose his character by an awkward concommittance of circumstances. (*Hypocritically.*) Lady Courtall might have become jealous, although I was so innocently engaged with that charming sample of rustic simplicity.

Enter LADY COURTALL.

Lady C. What a delightful surprise you have afforded me—I am quite delighted with the simplicity and ingenuousness of the new bride.

Sir C. Do you think she will do?

Lady C. I feel sure of it. And poor Sharpe, he seems to doat on her!—He's so kind, so affectionate!—His animation when he presented her to me bespoke the sincerity of conjugal love.—How gratifying it is to witness such connubial happiness in others, when all at one's own home breathes the same spirit of mutual tenderness.

Sir C. Oh, my charming reciprocity of sentiment! (*Embraces Lady Courtall, looking over her shoulder towards the pavilion.*) What the devil makes them stay so long?

Lady C. (*Stifling a laugh.*) Turning towards a looking-glass, I saw him——

Sir C. Saw him!——

Lady C. Steal a kiss.

Sir C. And you permitted him?

Lady C. My dear Sir Charles, could I find fault at a husband's stealing a sly caress?

Sir C. A husband! under that name he might.—Besides, Lady Courtall, you know how strict I am upon the score of morality and decency.

Lady C. I think I have seen you less severe.

Sir C. Never!—I must lecture Mister Sharpe a little.

Lady C. Not for what has just passed.

Sir C. No—for something else.

Lady C. That indeed—(*Crosses to* R.) I'll go and give orders to get a room ready for Grace, near our own.

[*Exit*, R.

Enter SHARPE, *from pavilion*, L.

Sir C. So, sir, you're come at last; you've been a plagny long time in the pavilion.

Sharpe. (*Aloud, as if for Lady Courtall to hear him.*) I beg your pardon, sir, but my wife——

Sir C. Your wife!—

Sharpe. Yes, sir; I was giving her a little advice as to her future conduct, now my lady has taken her into her service; and you know, sir——

Sir C. I do know, sir, that you are a scoundrel, and that I have a mind to horsewhip you within an inch of your life.

Sharpe. That's a good joke.

Sir C. I see how it is; you would be the ruin of that young creature!—You would take advantage of her simplicity and inexperience.—Under my roof, too, where you know an outrage to morality would——

Sharpe. Upon my soul, sir——

Sir C. Don't swear, sir.—What did you mean by that stolen kiss, eh?

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Who the devil could have told him that?

Sir C. You're trying to fudge up another lie, are you?

Sharpe. No, sir; I scorn it, sir—I—I—I did kiss her; but it was to promote your interest. I saw that my lady was not quite convinced by the tale I told her, in order to relieve you from your quandary just now, I didn't know what to do to put it out of all manner of doubt, so, sir, I—I—I thought of something desperate—and I kissed her—and I think you ought to be obliged to me, for I am sure it has settled your business. But it is always thus; servants may wear their very lives out, and their masters never think they go far enough.

Sir C. Quite the contrary; I think you have gone a great deal too far. Besides, I have a shrewd suspicion that this something *desperate* was in your own service.

Sharpe. Sir!

Sir C. You cannot deceive me—Grace is coming this way. You see that bower? (R.) I will conceal myself there, see every motion, hear every whisper—I shall now put both your zeal and fidelity to the proof.—You understand?

Sharpe. But, sir, suppose she herself—suppose Grace should—should take a liking to me—should absolutely court me, shall I be to blame?—Consider, sir, the frailty of human nature. I would do anything to promote your interest or your pleasure, but if a pretty girl should prefer——

Sir C. I am easy upon that score, quite easy. Now have a care; if you become *desperate* again, you shall first get a ducking in the horse-pond, and then be kicked out of doors.—What think ye of my promise?

Sharpe. That it would be more honoured in the breach than the observance.

Sir C. Remember—no desperation!

[*Retires into the bower, from which he occasionally peeps.*

Enter GRACE, *from pavilion*, L.

Grace. What a dear, good lady that is!—We shall be so happy now, because we shall stand in need of no further disguise.

Sir C. What does she say?

Sharpe. (*Endeavours by signs to make her comprehend that she must not talk so loudly, but finding every effort useless, exclaims, aside.*) Here's a pretty situation!—If I speak, I lose my place; if I hold my tongue I lose my wife—what the devil shall I do?

Grace. I may now tell everybody that you are my husband.

Sharp. (*With forced cheerfulness.*) Your husband! Come, come, Grace, you must not carry the joke too far. Husband and wife!—That's very well sometimes; but——

Grace. A husband in joke!—And have I only been carrying on a joke all this while?—Very well, sir, (*controlling her tears*)—very well—I needn't break my heart about you; I can get plenty of husbands upon the same terms.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) Yes, that would just crown the business.—Hear me, Grace—(*Aside.*) I must humour her, or she'll spoil all—(*In a low tone.*) Certainly, yes, I am your husband—(*Aloud for Sir Charles to hear; whilst he is making signs to Grace, that his master is in the bower.*) Sir Charles—the honour—who deserves my—if I were my own master, indeed—but my duty, my conscience—curse it, don't you understand me?

Grace. Not very clearly; but I dare say, it means, you are sorry for what I have done, and so I forgive you—there, you may take a kiss.

Sir C. (*Aside.*) Take a kiss!

Sharpe. (*Looks towards the bower—Sir Charles makes threatening signs.*) I wish I durst.

Grace. What! you won't? very well, sir,—I don't care, I—I—I will go and complain of your cruelty to my lady, so I will!

Sharpe. Oh, lord! Oh, lord!

Grace. I'll tell Sir Charles of it—he won't treat me so; he's a polite, good-natured gentleman.

Enter LADY COURTALL, R.

Lady C. Bless me!—What's the matter?—Quarrelling!—Oh, fie!

Sharpe. It's her fault, my lady.

Grace. No, it's all his fault, my lady.

Sharpe. I wished to——

Grace. No, he didn't wish: and when I offered him a kiss just now, he would not take it.

Lady C. Refuse to kiss your wife when she asks you, I'm ashamed of you.—Come, this must not be: I insist upon a reconciliation.

Sharpe. With all the submission to your ladyship—(*turns towards Sir Charles, shrugs his shoulders as much to say—"you see I can't help it"*) as you insist upon it—(*kisses Grace boisterously*) there—My dear Grace, forget what's past, and I will be a good boy for the future.

Grace. Oh, dear, my heart is ready to jump out of my bosom with joy!

Sir C. (*Comes forward with severity, between Grace and Sharpe.*) Still here, sir, after what I said to you.

Sharpe. (*Aside.*) I'm lost—pension, place, and all! There they go—good bye.

(*Crosses to* R. H. *corner.*)

Grace. Oh, pray, sir, do not turn my husband away?

Sir C. (*Aside.*) Her husband! The jade sticks to it.

Lady C. You won't turn the poor young man away, my dear?

Sir C. Yes, my love, I most undoubtedly will, and for very good reasons. He knows why I discharge him.

Sharpe. I, sir? No, sir, upon my soul I don't!

Lady C. Do not reply now; go into the house; I'll speak for you—I'll intercede. You will (*to Sir C.*) allow them to sleep here to-night.

Sir C. Lady Courtall!

Lady C. (*To Sharpe and Grace.*) There—there—go in: To-morrow let me see you; you know your room.

Grace. Come, William——

Sir C. Are you really sending them off together?

Lady C. No, my dear; it is you who are sending them away.

Sir C. But, Lady Courtall—they—they are not married, if the truth must out.

Lady C. Not married!

Sir C. Not married.

Grace. (*To Sharpe.*) What, don't he know that—

Sharpe. Hush!

Lady C. I am confounded!—so gentle—so apparently innocent—so pretty.

Sir C. Yes, yes, all that, if your please, but still not married. To think of the hypocrisy of this world! I quite loved that man; and as for her, I thought if she was as good as she was handsome, I should quite love her, too. But after such moral turpitude, I should fear to have them under the same roof with me. Nothing in the world could make me part with them but such conduct as they have been guilty of.

Sharpe. And would you, indeed, sir, have kept us if we had really been married?

(*In a tone of mock humility. He takes two papers from pocket, which Grace snatches from him and presents to Sir Charles.*)

Grace. That will convince you, sir, of the real truth. (*To Sharpe.*) You're so slow.

Sir C. Have you placed yourself under him to learn the true art of fibbing? This is some other forged tale. (*To Sharpe.*)

Sharpe. Authentic documents, sir: certificate of marriage, and attestion of character—(*Crosses to Sir Charles*)—which I hope you will have the kindness to sign for the satisfaction of Grace's friends.

Sir C. (*Reads.*) Hum—"married,—4th of June,—Church — William Sharpe, — Grace Jenkins,—Reverend Tye'emtight."—(*Reads the second note.*) "This is to certify that William Sharpe, steward to Sir Charles Courtall."—Steward!

Lady C. You remember that you promised him the situation.

Sharpe. If you will, sir, kindly subscribe that certificate of my good behaviour——

Sir C. And so, under sign manual, confirm you as my steward! Now is it really possible, that, for once, you can have told the truth?

Sharpe. Everything must have a beginning—(*Aside to Sir Charles.*) Besides, sir, I did not encroach upon your rights; you came poaching on my manor.

Sir C. (*Crosses to* L.—*Aside.*) I cannot help laughing when I think of the ridiculous figure Sharpe cut with the napkin under his arm—Come, I forgive all. You shall remain with me and be my steward. I only looked to honour and morality in all I did; those indispensable qualities attended to, I—I shall be glad to have Grace near me; and the world shall own that Courtly Hall can boast of two happy couples.

Grace. Then we are married now, for ever and ever.

Sharpe. We are indeed—(*to the audience*) and I hope our best friends will deign their indulgent acceptance of

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